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ABSTRACT

A description is given of a teaching project designed to provide teachers with avenues for professional growth and renewal and to encourage experienced teachers to remain in the classroom. This teacher-initiated and directed program incorporates three major components: (1) Collaboration between a college and a public school strenthens the preservice training of teachers by involving teacher interns in full-time classroom work and veteran teachers participating as supervisors of interns and lecturers at college seminars. (2) The team teaching component enables teachers to extend their teaching in new directions and provides flexibility for creative learning. (3) The concept of Alternative Professional Teaching Time allows teachers to actively engage in research, to train student teachers, and to become involved in curriculum planning. These activities are conducted during the regular school day by teachers who, as members of teaching teams, are freed from part of their classroom duties. (JD)

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THE TEACHING PROJECT: A MODEL FOR TEACHER EMPOWERMENT

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The Teaching Project: A Model for Teacher Empowerment

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The development of teaching as a major profession has been the subject of much rhetoric and discussion in recent years. Still, the Rand Corporation, in its latest report concluded, "Ten years of changes to improve teaching have produced an awesome amount of legislation but left unsettled the issue of whether teachers are professionals or semi-skilled workers."

It has long been our contention that the only way to make teaching a real profession is to substantially alter the job description and the worklife of the teacher. Unfortunately, this fundamental element of school reform has been overlooked in local school systems' attempts to improve schools.

As two elementary school teachers searching for ways to grow while remaining in the classroom, we sought to redesign the school day and reorganize staffing patterns to provide the teacher with sufficient time for reflection on educational practice, and opportunities for meaningful dialogue and decision making at the building level.

We wanted to create a model to provide teachers with avenues for professional growth and renewal, a model which would encourage experienced teachers to remain in the classroom as well as attract promising new personnel to the school community. And we wanted to create an environment in which teachers could work together in collegial teams.

Teachers have long lamented the sameness of their jobs where increasing skill never results in increased responsibilities. Isolated teachers in isolated classrooms feel tethered in place and stuck in jobs that never change.

The reform reports of the 1980s posited the need for recognizing the importance of the teacher's role as an integral part of any educational reform. These reports made it clear that the history of teachers was not the history of a professional group. Unlike true professionals, teachers learn their trade by their own devices. They serve no internship and receive little or no institutional support once they are hired. Pedagogical decisions are made by non-practitioners. Teachers are evaluated by non-practitioners who do not use the evaluation process to either assist or remove tenured teachers who lack competence.

In-service training, like many other facets of the teacher's worklife, is planned and executed by non-teachers in the school hierarchy and dictated to the teacher, whose concerns and opinions about in-service are rarely solicited and almost always disregarded.

The university, we realized, held the key to restructuring the worklife of the teacher. We proposed that our school system establish a school-university partnership for the purpose of simultaneously improving the worklife of the teacher and educating the next generation of schoolteachers. By eliminating the traditional dichotomy between the public school and the

university we could open up new possibilities for teacher growth.

We knew this would not be an easy feat, since for most of this century the university has had sole responsibility for pre-service training, research, and pedagogical theorizing. Schoolteachers, on the other hand, have been regarded as semi-skilled workers -- the deliverers of services to children. It became clear to us that in order to alter the present job description of the teacher, the traditional pattern of highly valued university expertise versus less valued classroom practice had to be radically altered.

We therefore designed **The Teaching Project**. The Graduate Education Department of Wheelock College in Boston became our partner in this new school/university collaboration. And after three years of intense lobbying and fundraising at both state and local levels, the project became a reality at the Edward Devotion School, a public school in Brookline, Massachusetts. This teacher-initiated and directed program incorporates the following components: a collaborative university/school-based model for pre-service training, alternative roles for teachers, and team teaching.

Preservice Training Component

The collaboration between Wheelock College and Devotion School is designed to provide a first-rate education for those entering the profession and also stimulate the professional

growth of career teachers who are involved in this new model of training. Our goal is to increase the importance of the clinical component and strengthen the role of school-based professionals. As John Goodlad states in a recent paper, "The juxtaposition of the action-oriented culture of the school and the inquiry-oriented culture of the university offers promise of shaking loose the calcified programs of both...."

In our program, graduate students working toward M.A.s in Education at Wheelock College, work full-time in classrooms and are included in every facet of the school day. Veteran teachers play a major role in the training of these interns and, in addition to the traditional role of cooperating teacher, also serve as supervisors of interns and lecturers at the twice weekly Wheelock College seminar.

Many Devotion School classroom teachers have presented their particular areas of expertise at these regularly scheduled sessions attended by both Wheelock students and interested Devotion faculty members. Listening to these teachers' presentations, we realized that their finely honed skills had never been shared with their peers. How sad to work in the same building with people and yet never know what creative ideas lie hidden behind closed classroom doors.

Team Teaching Component

Collegiality and experimentation have been the hot words in educational jargon the last few years. However, the reality is that schools are organized in a way that prevents collegial

interactions. The teaming component is our method for enabling teachers to work directly with one another instead of in competitive isolation. Our school principal devised a teaching schedule for Teaching Project members that permits three joint planning sessions a week. These meetings, organized so that team members can discuss pertinent issues and plan curricula with colleagues, stimulate teachers to interact in meaningful ways during the school day.

The team teaching model provides the flexibility for creative learning configurations to develop and flourish. Children benefit from a variety of teaching styles, spending time with teachers working in concert, and working directly with children from other classrooms in mixed age groupings. The idea pool is vastly increased, and the resultant stimulation is evident throughout the model.

The encouragement and support of the team has enabled team members to extend their teaching in new directions. Says one team member, "I like everything about it (teaming). I like thinking about ideas, working with colleagues. I have to say it's been very stimulating for me. I come to school energized. It gives me a feeling of security, support and intellectual stimulation."

A member of the project, a fifteen year veteran teacher, stated in a recent interview, "This is just the kind of change that I need. This program allows me to pursue something that is interesting and invigorating and professionally enhancing

for me without my having to leave teaching."

Alternative Professional Teaching Time (APT Time)

The traditional role of the teacher is to give direct services to children. The concept of teachers spending time during the school day in other pursuits is totally foreign to school culture. It is common practice, in fact, for school people to refer to non-teaching time as "free" time or "release" time. Since terminology reinforces perceptions and we wanted to change long-held beliefs, we had to find another name to describe the time used by teachers in fulfilling other aspects of their profession. We chose to call this new work period "Alternative Professional Teaching Time," with the acronym APT Time.

This invigorating component of our program emerged from our assumptions about the nature of teaching. For a teacher to remain vital, engaged and committed to teaching, opportunities for professional growth must be made available within the school day.

There must be time away from daily demands for periods of dialogue and reflection. Though a lengthened school year for teachers' professional renewal might be useful in some instances, the chance to work on alternative roles while the school is a functioning institution is equally important. It is essential to use the school as a learning laboratory while it is in session, testing ideas in an ongoing fashion, rather than devising curriculum in the school's silent halls during summer recess and imposing it on a fresh batch of children in

September. Research and Development in schools must be as ongoing as they are in industry for us to achieve maximal efficiency and effect.

The immediate question is: Who teaches the students while the teacher is pursuing these roles? The answer is that the new teaming configurations and the use of student teachers as co-teachers allows the reallocation of teaching responsibilities and teaching time so that classroom teachers can assume new roles within the context of the school day.

We are currently implementing three alternative roles for teachers within the school day.

- Teacher/Researcher - Teachers conduct research to improve their own teaching or that of a colleague, or to test the assumptions of educational theory in practice. When this is done as a school/university partnership, the stimulating collaborative inquiry generates hypotheses about teaching from the experience of teaching. Conducted in isolation, university-generated school research is impractical and inaccessible to classroom practitioners. The results of university/school-based research become relevant and accessible to other teachers and can be used by them to improve their craft.

A Teacher/Researcher in our project spends two afternoons a week observing and interviewing children, analyzing his data, and writing up his findings. He states, "The research I'm doing on children's fiction and nonfiction writing has given me enormous insight into a child's world view of writing. I

understand my students far better and I respect them more. I mean, it forces me to respect them, because I see there's a logic to the kinds of things they write."

- Teacher/Trainer - Teachers in the project have taken on the primary responsibility of demonstrating different teaching strategies and modes for the supervision of student teachers. In a more formal way than before, they help student teachers understand the curriculum, the students, the teaching/learning process, and the political and social environment of the school. Teacher/Trainers introduce pre-service teachers to the notions of cooperative and team approaches to teaching. The Teacher/Trainer works closely with the graduate faculty of Wheelock College in designing appropriate curricula and then connects the theories and research studied at the college with actual classroom practice.

- Teacher/Curriculum Writer - In our model the teacher is a legitimate author and decision-maker in curriculum development. Programs and activities are designed, piloted, implemented and evaluated by teachers, resulting in curricula more relevant to the needs of teacher and student. The Teacher/Curriculum Writer's work is done twice a week during the teacher's APT Time when creative thinking is more likely and energy is high.

A Teacher/Curriculum Writer works with other members of the team to integrate the arts into the team's classrooms. He has instructed all the team members and their children in graphic arts techniques and as a result the children's reports

and projects are measurably improved.

A photography curriculum written by a Teacher/Curriculum Writer has introduced the team's children to the myriad forms of cameras (including the eye itself) and has provided all team members with a usable and fascinating curriculum, developmentally appropriate and created by a practicing classroom teachers.

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The Teaching Project at Devotion School has been our attempt to assure the continuous renewal of teachers by restructuring their worklife. We are pleased to report that the consciousness of our system's central administration has been raised to the vital need for reflective time and alternative roles and career options for teachers.

We continue to investigate new ways to enhance the profession of teaching by providing enough challenge and variety to keep the best and brightest teachers in the classroom. It is only when classroom teachers shape the training of new teachers, write the curricula they use, and participate in school research, that teaching will truly become a profession.

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